San Francisco Bay Streams

The Setting

There are 57 major rivers and creeks that enter San Francisco Bay, not counting the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. Those 57 are fed, in turn, by 106 smaller streams. Virtually all of these streams historically supported spawning runs of salmon and steelhead trout. Today, only a few of them are capable of providing the needed spawning or rearing habitat.

Salmon and steelhead still enter and spawn in the Napa and Petaluma rivers, Sonoma Creek, Corte Madera Creek, Walnut and Wildcat creeks, Alameda Creek, the Guadalupe River and San Francisquito Creek.

The Problems

Bay area rivers and creeks have benefitted from several citizen restoration projects. These projects deserve continued support and encouragement from the Department of Fish and Game. It is not likely that the remaining salmon or steelhead streams in the area could be restored to support traditional fishing pressure. These streams can, however, act as preserves or outdoor classrooms – special places where the effects of development have been reversed enough to provide a glimpse of unspoiled nature.

Each stream has its own problems and opportunities. Wildcat Creek in Richmond, for example, exists only because its neighbors refused to accept a conventional flood control channelization project. Controversy over the Wildcat Creek project helped educate engineers and laypersons alike, to the physical, fiscal and social advantages of non-structural solutions to flood problems. Had the Wildcat Creek lesson come earlier, there would undoubtedly be many more productive salmon and steelhead streams in urban California.

Alameda Creek has strong restoration potential because its stream flow, which has been exploited, can be augmented with State Water Project supplies en route from the Delta to urban Project customers. Such "conjunctive" water use opportunities abound in California; they can contribute substantially to the statewide salmon and steelhead restoration program.

The California Department of Water Resources conducts a very popular, albeit modest, program of financial assistance to community groups engaged in the restoration of urban streams. There is enormous potential here; there is also much value in teaching the public about the advantages of low-cost, socially beneficial, non-structural solutions to community flooding problems. The Department's program can provide major benefits to the state over time and should surely be expanded.

The Solutions

ACTION: The Legislature should expand the Department of Water Resources' urban creeks restoration program. The program is complimentary to the restoration program outlined in SB 2261.

San Joaquin River Basin

The Setting

The San Joaquin River system flows from south to north, ending at the Delta where it joins the Sacramento River. This basin includes the watersheds of the Kern, Tule, Kaweah, Kings, Merced, Tuolumne, Stanislaus, Mokelumne and Cosumnes rivers.

Located at the southern end of the drainage, the Kern, Tule, Kaweah and Kings rivers only connect with the San Joaquin during extremely wet years. The federal dam built at Friant during the 1940's stopped spawning migrations and dewatered the San Joaquin River for a downstream distance of 50 miles —thus eliminating salmon and steelhead